

As an elected representative of the City of Fargo, I must act in the interest of Fargo's health, vitality, and the livelihoods of our residents. For this reason, I am voicing my strong opposition to House Bill 1386. This bill would not allow local officials to regulate hours of operation or capacity of businesses. During this fluid and dynamic pandemic, local leaders have routinely been tasked with making decisions which are best for their individual communities. This is the hallmark of local leadership, and I am concerned that putting that decision-making into the hands of the State Legislature would create a barrier to implementing potentially life-saving policies into place in the communities we serve and lead.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Burgum has consistently empowered local authorities to make the right decisions for their communities. This approach, coupled with his judicious utilization of state-wide emergency orders, has proven tremendously effective. Today, North Dakota is pacing the nation as a state with one of the lowest rolling positivity rates, it has ample hospital capacity and it is progressing well on its vaccination goals. That was not the case in November and December 2020. North Dakota's positivity rates soared to staggering heights at that time. Only when it was truly necessary did local authorities begin prudently utilizing capacity and hour adjustments for businesses. These efforts (in conjunction with mask mandates) have helped power this turnaround.

Furthermore, House Bill 1386 removes power from of the hands of local voters. Mayors, commissioners and councilmembers are elected by their constituents to create and modify local policies on their behalf. Restricting something as important as the ability to modify occupancy limits and hours of operations is not in the best interest of the residents of any community. Decisions of a magnitude this granular truly should be made by local elected officials who are closest to the people they serve.

In conclusion, Senators, I urge you to support the empowerment of North Dakota's local elected officials.